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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 4790
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9476
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000805

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Maariv reported that Israeli diplomatic sources said that President Bush will spend his May 14 visit celebrating Israel's 60th anniversary and not use the visit to push diplomatic issues.

Leading media reported that PM Ehud Olmert will meet PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas today for the first time in over a month. Maariv quoted Israeli diplomatic sources as saying that PM Olmert, along with FM Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Barak, want to increase the frequency of contacts with the PA. Israel Radio reported that Abbas is likely to request an end to the Gaza siege. On Sunday Israel Hayom reported that PM Olmert intends to draft by summer a joint declaration of principles that will establish a framework for a permanent status arrangement. The declaration of principles will address the "usual land mines" that derailed the previous agreements.

Ha'aretz reported that the U.S. and Israel seek to pressure North Korea to cease its nuclear cooperation with Iran, which is one of the motives behind their agreement to disclose details on the air-force strike in Syria last September. Ha'aretz cited information obtained by Washington and Jerusalem according to which North Korea transferred technology and nuclear materials to Iran to aid Tehran's secret nuclear arms program. Ha'aretz reported that U.S. and Israeli officials agreed last week that the talks between the U.S. and North Korea, scheduled to take place in Singapore tomorrow, should be used to pressure Pyongyang to disclose its nuclear cooperation with countries in the Middle East. As a pressure tactic, U.S. officials could reveal details of North Korea's cooperation with Syria to Congress. Ha'aretz reported that during talks in Washington last week, Yoram Turbowicz and Shalom Turgeman agreed to the release of details on the air strike. Media reported that Israel would continue to decline commenting on the matter, as it has done since September, and would not alter its censorship policy.

Maariv and other media reported that Israel warned Syria that it would consider Syria responsible for any attack to avenge the February assassination of senior Hizbullah operative Imad Mughniyah in Damascus. On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that Hizbullah may retaliate by using an explosives-packed drone aircraft. The newspaper reported that Iran provided UAVs to Hizbullah during the Second Lebanon War. On Sunday Maariv reported that the Israeli intelligence community has decided to form a special team that will be responsible for mapping out the various threats Hizbullah poses to Israel.

All media reported on Israel's largest-ever emergency exercise, which began on Sunday and will end on Thursday. Ha'aretz and other media quoted PM Olmert as saying: "The drill is no front for Israeli bellicose intentions toward Syria." (The media reported that Lebanese FM Fouad Siniora, Hizbullah, and Syria have expressed concern over the exercise.) Maariv reported that one of the drills involves an "Iranian attack against Israel." Ha'aretz reported that Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin told cabinet ministers yesterday that that Egypt is doing more to prevent weapons smuggling from Sinai into Gaza along the Philadelphia strip. Yediot quoted Diskin as saying that Israel's relief measures for the Palestinians that are not granted in exchange for anything serious will only invite terror.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday Kadima cabinet ministers warned Hamas of dire consequences if any harm comes to kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. The warning came after top Hamas leaders publicly threatened his life. The Jerusalem Post and Yediot reported that Moussa Abu Marzouk, deputy head of Hamas's political bureau, told the Kuwaiti Al-Qabas newspaper on Sunday that the group would negotiate with Israel over Shalit's bones if Hamas prisoners were not released. Hamas lawmaker Mushir al-Masri warned Shalit's parents Saturday that Israel was jeopardizing their son by not agreeing to release the Palestinian prisoners. Ha'aretz quoted Abu Marzouk as saying in the Kuwaiti daily that Israel has rejected a temporary cease-fire brokered by Egypt.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel has rejected the Palestinians' offer to deploy their national security force's special battalion in Hebron. After talks between the two sides and consultations with the U.S., Israel and the Palestinians agreed that the battalion would be stationed in Jenin instead.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that veteran Fatah officials in Ramallah warned over the weekend that some of their "young guard"

colleagues were planning to stage a "coup" against the faction's leadership.

Ha'aretz reported that Peace Now is marking 30 years since its inception. The newspaper said that the group "has apparently never before looked or sounded more part of the establishment than during the days of the Olmert government." Ha'aretz quoted former Meretz MK Dedi Zucker as saying: "Some of us became Knesset members. There is a minister. But when I peel away the trappings, then Peace Now is a nice non-profit whose vision is really right but whose agenda also led to a quarter of a million settlers in the West Bank."

The Jerusalem Post reported that all IAF top commanders are Harvard graduates.

The Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz reported that in the latest attack targeting Yemen's few remaining Jews, rebel Houthi militiamen destroyed several homes that had belonged to the now-absent Jewish community in the northwestern Saada province. Ha'aretz reported that Magen Avraham, the largest synagogue in Beirut, is in danger of being demolished as part of a city center renovation project.

Major media reported that the expected cost of Israel's 60th anniversary celebrations is 98 million shekels (around \$27 million). On Sunday Ha'aretz cited a statement issued by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations that the three U.S. presidential hopefuls are scheduled to serve as vice-chairmen of the National Committee for Israel's 60th.

Over the weekend major media cited the British weekly The Economist as saying that the Israeli economy is stable, but that it has shaky foundations, particularly in education.

On Sunday Ha'aretz and other media reported that Attorney General Mazuz recently instructed the Israel Airports Authority "to implement visible equality" between Arabs and Jews in security checks at Ben-Gurion Airport.

Mideast:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The least required of the American president who forced the elections that brought Hamas to power is to translate his 'vision' into a peace treaty."

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom: "The declaration of principles that Ehud Olmert and Abu Mazen are cooking up is not a diplomatic document.... It is a delusional initiative that is devoid of any real content."

Former Mossad director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Mashal's declaration diametrically contradicts al-Qaida's approach, and provides Israel with an opportunity, perhaps an historic one, to leverage it for the better."

Contributor Dmitri Reisman wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "The question is whether the Roadmap ... may turn out to be a great delusion and whether there is ... a different, truer map, with which both sides, not just one, can be happy."

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz: "The practical result of Bush's enmity [toward Syria] is that Damascus is waiting for the next American president."

Block Quotes:

1I. "The Time Has Come for Bush to Intervene"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/7): "Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas have repeatedly said they are committed to the two-state solution. Both of them agree, more or less, on the principles of an agreement. Both of them are maneuvering between the fear of being toppled by the camp that opposes the political process and the risk that the neighboring government will be toppled by opponents of compromise. It would be far easier for both of them to win domestic support for a peace agreement that the United States played an active role in preparing.

When Bush wants to influence reality, as in the case of Iraq, he does not hide behind the dubious excuse that the United States cannot interfere in another country's internal matters. The U.S. does not need to send its boys to risk their lives in the Nablus market or the outposts of the Hebron Hills. But the U.S. has not fulfilled its obligation simply by removing a few roadblocks from the West Bank. The least required of the American president who forced the elections that brought Hamas to power is to translate his 'vision' into a peace treaty."

II. "A Delusional Initiative"

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom (4/6): "The declaration of principles that Ehud Olmert and Abu Mazen are cooking up is not a diplomatic document. It is for an election campaign. It is for elections in Israel and perhaps in the Palestinian Authority. It is a delusional initiative that is devoid of any real content. Its sole purpose is to show the Israeli public that the 'emperor has new clothes' as if there were anything of substance to them. Olmert doesn't have a public-moral mandate to engage in political negotiations that lead to obligations. But he still has a parliamentary majority which entitles him to engage in dialogue in the name of the people. He can 'go for broke.' He can try to make the dream he harbors in his heart -- the Geneva agreement plus Israeli willingness to take in Palestinian refugees -- come true. If that is the case, let him present to the public a whole and courageous draft agreement that addresses the issues of the refugees and Jerusalem, and let him face the voter and face his fate on election day. It won't work. It was tried in the past until it became apparent that there isn't a Palestinian partner even for a generous peace of the kind that Ehud Barak offered at Camp David.... We could also reconcile ourselves with a different course of action in which the government takes steps to prevent itself from being perceived by the world as a rejectionist country and, as such, talks with Abu Mazen while pretending that it and he have a mandate from their respective constituencies to close a political deal. What is the problem? Every such document entails one-sided losses.... If Olmert promises to take Palestinian refugees into Israel -- and there is a discrepancy over which number he discussed with Abu Mazen, but there is no doubt that they discussed the matter -- the precedent will have been set.... The survival of the government is not worth the price of that piece of paper, even if they refer to it with phony pomp and ceremony as a 'declaration.'"

III. "Khaled Mashal's Bombshell"

Former Mossad director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/7): "Only a weak echo was heard in the Israeli and international media after the interview given by Khaled Mashal to the Palestinian newspaper Al-Ayyam last week. Mashal said publicly for the first time that his movement would recognize the 1967 borders for a Palestinian state and that the arrangement would have to include the issues of Jerusalem and the refugees.... Hamas, and Mashal as one of its spokesmen, does not want to participate directly in peace talks with Israel. If it receives legitimacy as a recognized partner in the overall Palestinian equation, it will leave it to Abu Mazen to conduct the talks. Israel is not being required, then, to sit down face to face with Hamas representatives.

This being the case, why are Israel and the international community refusing to permit Hamas's inclusion? Whoever examines the publicly-stated positions of Fatah and Hamas must admit that there is no difference between them..... If Israel does not seriously consider a change of policy in light of the voices coming from the leaders of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and in Damascus, under conditions that are optimal for Israel at the present time, we may find ourselves quickly falling down a slippery slope.... In the past two

weeks, Ayman al-Zawahiri has called twice to attack Jews and Israel, 'in Israel and everywhere else.' In the eyes of al-Qaida, the members of Hamas are perceived as heretics due to their stated desire to participate, even indirectly, in processes of any understandings or agreements with Israel. Mashal's declaration diametrically contradicts al-Qaida's approach, and provides Israel with an opportunity, perhaps an historic one, to leverage it for the better. Are our eyes too blind to see? Are our ears too deaf to hear?"

IV. "Is the Roadmap Good for the Jews?"

Contributor Dmitri Reisman wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (4/7): "Until this very day, at every meeting with Condoleezza Rice, U.S. President George Bush, EU envoy [sic] Tony Blair, or other important people, Israeli leaders keep repeating the same mantra: They swear allegiance to the legendary qualities of the Roadmap -- the map of the 'peace treasure' in the Middle East.... Of course the Palestinians have not ceased terror and violence; they never intended to do so. As is well known, we removed -- not some outpost or community... An entire population -- tens of thousands -- who lived in Gaza for years and made them refugees.... What about the Palestinian state in interim borders? It has been standing in place for years. This state is better known by the name of Hamastan.... What about the 'peace treasure'? The battle for peace is raging. The [Hamas] gang ... is holding a prisoner, and as abductors would have it, is negotiating over the captive and the terms of his release. Also, the gang is shelling with rockets unperturbed.... The question is whether the Roadmap ... may turn out to be a great delusion and whether there is ... a different, truer map, with which both sides, not just one, can be happy."

IV. "Damascus, Ramallah, or Tehran"

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz (4/7): "President George W. Bush indeed blatantly abhors the Syrian regime, but Israel's pointing to this fact as a reason for the deadlock in the channel between Jerusalem and Damascus is a mere excuse. No American administration has ever dared to repudiate diplomatic progress between Israel and the Arabs when this was achieved under its nose and contrary to its plans. The practical result of Bush's enmity is that Damascus is waiting for the next American president. Whether this is John McCain, who supports an Israeli-Syrian agreement and respects the advice of Baker and Brent Scowcroft, former advisers to Bush Sr., who urged him to achieve this; or whether it is Hillary Clinton, who told an Israeli friend that she would prefer an effort in that channel to treading water in the Palestinian channel; or whether it is Barak Obama, who favors conciliation in a pleasant manner and by way of a dialogue between rivals, the year 2009 will be one of renewed efforts at contact.... But so long as Bush is sitting in the White House, a military move by Assad would be an adventurous gamble. Even if the outcome between the countries is a forgone conclusion, on the way there Bush is likely to permit Israel to deal a smashing blow to Syria, to its regime and even to Assad himself. And so this is a time of not-war and not-peace in the North. A military conflict would be bad for Syria and bad for Israel, which is focused on the nuclear threat posed by Iran."

JONES